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West Europe Re-evaluates Soviet Policy

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COPENHAGEN, Dec. 3 — The leaders of the Common Market nations began two days of meetings here today to try to unify their positions on East-West matters and on protectionism before important discussions next week with American officials.

The regularly scheduled conference, one of the two held yearly by the European Economic Community's chiefs of state and government, centered on exchanges between the leaders on possible differences in Soviet policy after the death of Leonid I. Brezhnev and on European attitudes toward shoring up the community's agricultural markets and weakened industries.

Both areas will be the main points of discussion in the series of United States-European meetings next week that will end in Brussels next Friday with a session of NATO's Atlantic Council.

Shultz and Regan to Attend

American delegations, led by Secretary of State George P. Shultz and Secretary of the Treasury Donald T. Regan, will also be talking in Brussels and Frankfurt with officials of the Common Market's Permanent Commission, or executive body, and with European finance ministers.

The European leaders, including four new government heads who have not previously participated in such talks — Chancellor Helmut Kohl of West Germany, Prime Minister Amintore Fanfani of Italy, Prime Minister Ruud Lubbers of the Netherlands and Prime Minister Poul Schluter of Denmark — talked for three hours at an afternoon session and then at a private dinner at Christiansborg Palace, the seat of Danish Government.

Spokesmen for the delegations said the leaders' agenda included the possibility of Soviet movement on the Afghanistan situation, developments in Poland and how they would affect the East-West climate, and the implications of recent talks between the Soviet Union and China.

Although some of the causes of recent tension between Europe and the United States, like the dispute over steel subsidies and the sanctions involving the Soviet gas pipeline deal, have been resolved, there are continuing problems in relation to defining the West's overall approach to the Soviet Union.

Focus on Trade Issues

Spokesmen here indicated that the most intense discussion among the Europeans involved trade issues related to the troubled talks at the world conference on trade and tariffs in Geneva last week.

Although the Common Market offered a joint statement then making it clear that it would not remove, as requested by the United States, its subsidies for community agricultural exports, substantial differences in attitudes toward protectionism continue among Europeans, notably between the French and the West Germans.

A senior French Government official said tonight that France was stressing "the importance of the reconquest of the community's internal market" — a phrase used to refer to the penetration here of advanced technological products from the United States and Japan.

The official said France was advocating use of the community's common external tariffs "as an instrument" to assist what he called fragile industry and to defend against "aggressive competition." Although he denounced national protectionism, there was something of a similar tone in a report on maintaining the community's internal market that was given to the government heads today by the President of the Common Market Commission, Gaston Thorn.

Mr. Thorn's statement was not a direct appeal for protective measures, but he added an equivocal phrase that said "a genuine internal market implies, of course, an active external commercial policy." If this kind of attitude was translated into policy in the Common Market countries — perhaps

the establishment of quotas on all kinds of advanced technology that Europe is not now producing — it would necessarily involve a change in the traditional free-trade policy of West Germany.

Earlier in the week the West German Economics Minister, Otto Lambsdorff, suggested this was not at hand and said France might be seeking to install protectionism throughout Europe. "I consider it to be dangerous," he said.